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Brittany N. Murray  
*University of Central Florida*



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# DOES RELIGIOSITY DETER JUVENILE DELINQUENCY?

by

BRITTANY N. MURRAY  
B.A. University of Central Florida, 2008

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
in the Department of Sociology  
in the College of Sciences  
at the University of Central Florida  
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## **ABSTRACT**

The study presented here uses data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health Wave I (Add Health) to examine the association between juvenile delinquency and religiosity. Juvenile delinquency is an area that has received increasing research interest over the last decade; however, much of this research has primarily focused on family, peers, and education as factors that may reduce delinquent involvement. While all of these are influential in the lives of youth, it is possible there are other factors as well. Religiosity has been shown to have influential effects throughout the life course; however, little research has focused specifically on the relationship between religiosity and juvenile delinquency and even less has centered on this relationship in terms of gender and race/ethnicity. The results of this study will contribute to the literature on juvenile delinquency by providing an in-depth look at the effects of religiosity in adolescence, gender and racial/ethnic trends, as well as possibly provide information valuable to prevention efforts.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .....	vi
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER TWO: BACKGROUND.....	4
Gender and Delinquency.....	4
Gender and Religiosity .....	6
Gender, Religion, and Delinquency.....	7
Race and Delinquency .....	10
Race and Religion .....	12
Race, Religion, and Delinquency.....	13
Religion and Delinquency.....	13
CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE.....	17
Social Control Theory.....	17
CHAPTER FOUR: METHOD .....	19
Measurements Section .....	20
Gender Variables .....	20
Age Variable .....	20
Delinquency Variables.....	20
Race Variables .....	22
Social Control Variables.....	22
Religion Variables .....	24
CHAPTER FIVE: RESULTS .....	25
Table 1: Sample Characteristics Table .....	25
Correlations.....	26
Table 2 .....	26
Table 3 .....	30
Regression.....	32
Table 4: Non-Violent Regression .....	32
Table 5: Violent Regression.....	36
Gender (Table 6).....	39
Race/Ethnicity (Table 7 & Table 8).....	43
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION .....	49
Social Control .....	52
Social Acceptance.....	52
Feeling a part of one's school .....	53
Desire to go to college .....	53
Activities .....	54
Religion Variables .....	54
Importance of Religion .....	54
Church Attendance.....	55
Prayer Frequency .....	56
Youth Church Activity.....	56

What do these findings mean? .....	57
Religion.....	57
Gender.....	58
Race/Ethnicity.....	60
Limitations .....	60
Future Studies .....	61
REFERENCES .....	62

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Sample Characteristics.....	26
Table 2: Delinquency and Religion Variables (Correlations).....	29
Table 3: Delinquency and Religion Variables by Gender (Correlations).....	32
Table 4: Non-Violent Scale Regression.....	35
Table 5: Violent Scale Regression.....	38
Table 6: Non-Violent and Violent Delinquency by Gender (Regression).....	42
Table 7: Ethnicity/Race by Non-Violent Delinquency (Regression) .....	45
Table 8: Ethnicity/Race by Violent Delinquency (Regression).....	48

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

Research on juvenile delinquency and religiosity separately has flourished; however, the relationship between the two has not received quite the same amount of research attention.

Overall, researchers have found that juveniles who are more religious are less likely to commit delinquent acts but there are many other possible factors that may play a role (Chadwick & Top, 1993; Dew et al., 2008). While the literature is limited, the effects of race and gender on the relationship between religiosity and delinquency may also be important to consider. The study presented here attempts to fill in some of the gaps regarding the relationship between religiosity and delinquency while unveiling important trends based on gender and race.

In 2008, approximately 2.11 million juvenile arrests were made nationwide (excluding traffic violations) (Puzzanchera, 2009). Juvenile arrests account for approximately 15% of all arrests made in 2008, accounting for over a fourth of the property crime index arrests and 16% of all violent crime index arrests (Puzzanchera, 2009). Between 2006 and 2008, juvenile arrests decreased for violent crime after increasing between 2004 and 2006; however, property crime arrests increased between 2006 and 2008 for the first time since 1994 (Puzzanchera, 2009). While juvenile arrests do not comprise the majority of arrests overall, juvenile offending has still proven to be a problem that many researchers have attempted to explain (Puzzanchera, 2009).

Juvenile delinquency, as used here, is a broad term for minor and major offenses committed by juveniles under the age of 18 years old. Generally studies look specifically at the ages of 10-17 years old and will include all offenses punishable by law against minors which include: violent crime index crimes (murder, manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault), property crime index crimes (burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft,



arson, other assaults, and vandalism), weapon possession, drug abuse violations, driving under the influence, liquor laws, drunkenness, disorderly conduct, curfew and loitering, and running away (Crime in the United States, 2006, 2007). Overall, juvenile delinquency rates have fluctuated greatly over the last couple of decades specifically in terms of specific offending (Knoll & Sickmund, 2010).

Before understanding any possible relationship between religion and delinquency, it is first important to understand some background on religion. According to the U.S. Religious Landscape Survey (2008)<sup>1</sup> only approximately 16.9% of the U.S. population is religiously unaffiliated (atheist, agnostic, etc.). Similarly only about 15% of juveniles are alienated from organized religion (Smith, Faris, Lundquist Denton, & Regnerus, 2003). These findings indicate that overall religion is at least somewhat important to both the majority of U.S. citizens as well as U.S. youth. As can be seen in the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR)<sup>2</sup>, Wave I (Smith & Pearce, 2003) religiosity among all adolescents is substantial. According to Smith and Pearce (2003), approximately 81.5% of juveniles think religion is at least somewhat important in daily life (leaving approximately 18.5% of adolescents not finding religion important at all in daily life). Religiosity is often measured by the use of three levels: “subjective (self-perceived strength of religious affiliation), behavioral (church attendance), and quasi-institutional (extent of

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<sup>1</sup> Survey conducted by a nonpartisan organization, Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. This survey is part of a project by Pew Research Center funded by Pew Charitable Trusts. This survey was conducted in English and Spanish and only administered to persons over 18 years old. This survey had a sample of over 35,000 participants of all different religious backgrounds.

<sup>2</sup> The National Study of Youth and Religion, <http://www.youthandreligion.org>, whose data were used by permission here, was generously funded by Lilly Endowment Inc., under the direction of Christian Smith, of the Department of Sociology at the University of Notre Dame and Lisa Pearce, of the Department of Sociology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

respect given to religious leaders)” (Alston, 1975, p. 165). From the statistics offered above, it seems clear that religion plays a role in the lives of the majority of the adolescents in the U.S.; however, the importance of each level of religiosity varies and these variations will be explored later in the literature.

While most researchers who have looked at the relationship between religiosity and delinquency have come to nearly the same conclusion that religiosity has a negative relationship with delinquency, each has raised different questions regarding the complex intersection between these two variables (Chadwick & Top, 1993; Dew et al., 2008; Bahr et al., 1998; Regnerus & Elder, 2003). In an effort to clarify some of the complexities and bring to light some answers to questions looming within the literature, this study will look specifically at gender and racial differences in the relationship between religiosity and delinquent behavior.

In order to establish a better understanding of the relationship between religiosity and delinquency while accounting for race and gender, it is important to first outline the relationships between each of the variables. This information is also important to determine any influential impact that each of these variables/relationships may have on the overall relationship between religiosity and delinquency. For this study, the focus will primarily be on the subjective and behavioral aspects of religiosity amongst youth. The purpose here is to establish whether or not religiosity acts as a deterrent to juvenile delinquency and, if so, how these varying levels of religiosity may have an impact.

## **CHAPTER TWO: BACKGROUND**

### Gender and Delinquency

Juvenile arrest rates show substantial differences between female and male offending over the last couple of decades. According to the most recent FBI arrest data, approximately 70% of the juveniles arrested were male meaning approximately 30% of juvenile arrests were females (Puzzanchera, 2009). Overall, males are slightly more likely than females to commit all offenses except status offenses and technical violations (violation of probation, parole, and valid court order) where females were found to commit more of than males (Census of juveniles in residential placement 2006, 2008). Also, females only comprised approximately 15% of the juveniles in correctional custody in 2006 (Census of juveniles in residential placement 2006, 2008).

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (2006) reported that, overall, female arrests have increased since the 1980's; however, while female arrests have risen, males are still more likely to be arrested than females. The trend in arrest rates for males and females are comparable, both peaking in the mid-1990's and slowly decreasing from there. The difference is male arrest rates are quite a bit higher than female arrest rates. For example, in the mid-1990's when both arrest rates peaked, males were at about 14,000 arrests per 100,000 males whereas females were at about 5,000 arrests per 100,000 females.

While the differences in rates of offending between males and females have been discussed at length throughout the literature, the reasons behind these differences are still unclear. One proposed reason as to why these differences exist is the process of socialization and

the differences between socialization for males versus socialization of females. Socialization of gender often starts at birth beginning with pink blankets for girls and blue blankets for boys. Little girls are treated as fragile and needing constant protection whereas boys are thought to be tougher and treated rougher and with less need for protection. Traditional gender roles expect females to cook, raise children, keep a tidy home, and provide support for their husbands while males are expected to provide for their families financially and be the head of the household. Within this gender roles framework, males are encouraged to be aggressive and determined while females are encouraged to be warm and subordinate. “Boys will be boys” is a common response to unruly, aggressive, and destructive behaviors or attitudes that boys may portray; however, if girls were to behave or act in these same ways, they would likely not be given the same leniency (Fischer, 2000). Also, it is possible that girls are supervised more heavily than boys which would provide males with more opportunities to be delinquent.

Loy and Norland (1981) found that males and females with similar gender role expectations were more likely than males and females with more traditional gender role expectations to have similar delinquency behavioral patterns. In support of these findings, researchers have found that juveniles with less feminine role expectations often have less attachments to non-delinquent others, less regard for rules and laws, and have more opportunity to commit delinquent acts (Shover et al., 1979). Given these findings, it would appear evident that socialization plays an influential role in the propensity for adolescents to commit crimes.

Another proposed reason for gender differences includes the differences in stress experienced by males and females; however, research has not been able to show that stress alone is the only reason for these differences (Jang & Johnson, 2005). Research has shown that even

faced with the same levels of stress and hardship, females and males still typically respond in very different ways (Jang & Johnson, 2005; Hay, 2003). One study found females and males responded differently to the same levels of strain with males more likely to respond in more serious, violent, and even criminal ways (Jang & Johnson, 2005). As mentioned previously (Jang & Johnson, 2005; Hay, 2003; Schulte et al., 2009), research on the relationship between females and delinquency was minimal until recently; however, over the last decade there has been an increase of research in this area. While research has shown an increase in female juvenile delinquency rates (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006), there is still debate as to whether or not these rates are climbing or if it simply appears this way due to this area being overly ignored in past research. Nevertheless, female delinquents are beginning to receive the research attention that they deserve.

### Gender and Religiosity

Just as parenting and peers influence the people we become, research has shown that religiosity is also influential (Regnerus & Elder, 2003). Many children are taught morals and ethics at some point in their lives whether it is from church, caregivers, friends, school, or some sort of combination. This teaching instills values in children to help promote good character and good choices in the hopes of promoting success and well-being. It is this same reasoning that brings religion to the forefront when discussing juveniles and their life pathways. In order to understand the relationship religiosity has to juvenile delinquency, it is important to first understand the relationship juveniles may have to religiosity.

Overall, studies show that females tend to be more religious than males and when looking at adolescents this trend is still evident (Smith, 2003). According to the findings of Smith and

Pearce (2003), 78.4% of the 1,700 males surveyed believed religion to be at least somewhat important in daily life whereas 84.7% of the 1,670 females surveyed believed religion to be at least somewhat important. While the percentages here are fairly close, the gender differences can still be seen here as they are seen in the other literature. Another interesting point from this data is that of the respondents, almost a fourth of the females answered that religion was “extremely important” to their daily lives while only 15% of the males responded in the same manner.

As discussed with gender and delinquency, some researchers attribute the gender variances in religiosity to socialization (Gauthier et al., 2006). Based on traditional gender roles, females are taught to be passive, subordinate, and to fill caretaking roles—all of which have been linked to higher levels of religiosity (Miller & Stark, 2002; Gauthier et al., 2006). A study conducted by Gauthier and associates (2006) found that overall, females possess higher levels of religiosity and greater religious participation while males were found to have more religious doubt. While females are seen to be more religiously active than males, they are also seen to be more confident in their faith as well (Gauthier et al., 2006). There are a few possible factors contributing to gender differences in religiosity; therefore, it is important to investigate each possibility to uncover trends and reasoning behind such differences.

### Gender, Religion, and Delinquency

Based on research findings regarding gender differences in delinquency and religiosity separately it may be important to consider the intersections between the three of them. This literature indicates females tend to be more religious than males (Smith & Pearce, 2003; Gauthier et al., 2006), males tend to be more delinquent than females (Snyder & Sickmund,

2006; Schulte et al., 2009), and overall religiosity and delinquency have a negative relationship (Regnerus & Elder, 2003); however, few studies have looked at the relationship between all three. In general, while religiosity tends to have a negative relationship to delinquency, studies have suggested that the strength of this relationship may be dependent on the varying dimensions of religiosity (subjective and behavioral particularly) (Stark, 1996; Regnerus & Elder, 2003). These dimensions are more clearly seen when looking at gender differences on the basis of religiosity and delinquency.

Variations in levels of religiosity appear to make a difference in terms of delinquency as well. For example acceptance into a religious congregation (feelings of acceptance and belonging) is associated with more positive peer interaction and deterrence, and higher self-esteem (Chadwick & Top, 1993). In addition, private religious behavior (i.e. prayer) often points to internalized beliefs and morals which then act as more of a deterrent to delinquency (Regnerus & Elder, 2003). Importantly these aspects of religiosity may vary by gender. Chadwick and Top (1993) found: church attendance/congregation acceptance to be more significant in shielding boys from delinquency than girls, religious beliefs overall were less of a deterrent for boys while religious beliefs proved to be an effective deterrent for girls, and private religious behavior proved to be a strong predictor of many forms of delinquency for both boys and girls. As seen here, church attendance was found to have a significantly strong impact on boys' delinquency and the reasoning offered behind this has to do with the interactions with adolescents and other church-goers. Much like peer influence has seen to be a strong indicator of delinquent behavior, church attendance is seen to be a sign of positive peer influence and less negative peer pressure. While Chadwick and Top (1993) found peer influence significant in predicting delinquent

behavior for both boys and girls, perhaps boys are in more need of a positive social network than girls.

With regard to delinquency, gender, and religion studies find that religion/religiosity is a stronger deterrent for females than males and that the levels of deterrence vary as well. Albrecht, Chadwick, and Alcorn (1977) found in their study that the correlation between religious participation and self-reported deviance was stronger for boys than girls. Albrecht et al. (1977) also found that, for boys, the most influential factor with regard to victimless crimes was peer influence and then religiosity and then family; however, for victim-based crimes family was the most influential. For girls, the strongest influence on victim-based crimes was “perceived deviance of peers,” and the strongest influence on victimless crimes is religiosity followed by family (Albrecht, et al., 1977, p. 271). Overall, the strongest predictor of deviance for boys was peer influence and the strongest predictor of deviance for girls was religious behavior (Albrecht et al., 1977). As explained here, while religiosity certainly plays a role in delinquency, the level of influence may vary by gender.

It is possible that the gender differences in the relationship between religiosity and gender are a result of gender differences in socialization. While few studies have looked at this particular area, a couple of studies have looked at the effects of socialization on gender as well as the effects of socialization on risk preference (deviance or desire to be deviant) and religiosity. As explained by Miller and Hoffmann (1995), preferences of risk have been seen to vary based on gender and it can be argued that this variation in risk preference can help to explain the gender gap in juvenile delinquency (Miller & Hoffman, 1995). According to Miller and Hoffman (1995), gender specific socialization patterns are what help in the development of risk



preferences early in life. They also state that it is these differences in socialization that account for the differences in religiosity between genders making males less religious and females more religious overall (Miller & Hoffman, 1995).

Overall, a relationship between religiosity, gender, and delinquency appears to exist regardless of the influential factors in play within this relationship. Particularly, religiosity appears to be a better deterrent and predictor of delinquency for girls in comparison to boys; however, it should not be ignored that religiosity does appear to have a relationship to male delinquency as well.

### Race and Delinquency

While minorities tend to be overrepresented in many arenas including adult arrest rates and adult jails, minorities also comprise the majority of the juvenile offenders in custody in the United States (Age specific arrest rates..., 2003). According to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, “For every 100,000 non-Hispanic black juveniles living in the U.S., 767 were in a residential placement facility on February 22, 2006 - for Hispanics the rate was 326, and for non-Hispanic whites it was 170” (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006). Despite the lack of research in this area, the statistics speak for themselves. Further, these statistics have remained relatively consistent in terms of racial disparities; therefore, it would appear evident that perhaps non-white adolescents are more likely to offend than white adolescents. However, it is important to note that this generalization should be made with caution given that it is unknown how accurate these custody rates represent actual offending rates.

Research on this intersection between race and delinquency has also supported the notion that non-whites are more likely to offend than whites. Jensen (1976) looked at the differences between white juvenile offenders and non-white juvenile offenders on the basis of achievement-level. The research here provided support that even on the highest end of achievement-level; non-whites scored higher on the delinquent scale compared to whites. Several attempts have been made to unveil the reasons as to why non-white juveniles are more likely to offend than white juveniles and while these attempts have produced varying results, many findings point to family structure. Specifically, socioeconomic status and family strain/breakdown of the family structure are two influences that are looked at most. For example, Matsueda and Heimer (1987) looked at the effect of broken homes on juvenile delinquency for black adolescents and nonblack adolescents. According to their findings, the influence of having a broken home in terms of delinquency proved to be much larger for Blacks than other races (Matsueda & Heimer, 1987). Broken homes as defined in this study and many others are typically characterized by poverty and other common problems linked to poverty including lower parental supervision, more self-care among minors, and less stable family structure (more single-parent households, divorce, etc.) Based on the 2002 U.S. Census data, 22.7% of Blacks are below the poverty threshold while only 7.8% of Whites (non-Hispanic) and 18.6% of other (including all ethnicities other than black and white) are below this threshold (Current Population Survey, 2003). By looking at income level alone, it would appear from these data that Blacks are more likely to experience the effects of a broken home; therefore, it is possible that Black adolescents are more likely to offend due to these contributing factors possibly followed by Hispanic adolescents.

### Race and Religion

While research has not quite pinpointed the reason, many studies have shown that Blacks (including Black youth) tend to be more religious individuals than any other race. According to the NSYR (2003) data, African American/Black youth were more likely to find the most importance in religion followed by American Indian/Native American youth who were then followed by White/Caucasian/Anglo youth. Similarly, another study also found that Black youth were more likely to hold the highest regard for faith, pray more, and be 'born again' (amongst Protestants) as opposed to Asian, Hispanic, and White youth who all had similar levels of religiosity (Smith et al., 2003). Several other studies support these findings and it does not appear that there is a study that negates this relationship between race and religiosity (Fowler, Ahmed, Tompsett, Jozefowicz-Simbeni, & Toro, 2008; Ellison, 1993). It is important to understand the differences in religious importance among racial groups; however, given this information, it should not be ignored that religion is still central to other races other than the Black community.

Smith et al. (2003) looked at the relationship between American adolescents and religion and found that overall, religion is at least somewhat important to most youth in the United States. Overall, race does matter in terms of religiosity; however, religion appears to matter to adolescents of all races to a degree as well. Research shows that levels of religiosity among adolescents has been fairly stable over the last several decades (Smith et al., 2003); however, it is unclear as to why there are such variations in religiosity between Black youth and other races of youth. More research is needed to determine the reasoning behind the formation of these relationships as well as to see how influential these relationships are in terms of well-being, life choices, etc.

### Race, Religion, and Delinquency

The literature on race and religion shows that Blacks tend to be more religious than other races and it would appear that Blacks tend to be more delinquent than other races as well. Research on the relationship between race, religion, and delinquency, however, is very limited. In one study, Fowler et al. (2008) looked at the relationship between race and religiosity while including variables of community violence and the effects of these variables on substance use and deviant behaviors among emerging adults. Fowler et al. (2008) focused primarily on African Americans (Blacks) and European Americans (Whites) and found that, when exposed to high levels of community violence, Black youth who were more publicly religious reported less substance abuse and more privately religious Black youth reported fewer acts of deviant behavior. In addition to these findings on Blacks, Fowler et al. (2008) found that, similar to Black youth, more publicly religious White youth reported less substance abuse when exposed to high levels of community violence; however, private religiosity did not provide the same protection against deviant behavior or substance abuse for White youth as it did for Blacks. It has been seen that Blacks tend to be more religious than other races; however, in addition to this, the findings here suggest that perhaps religiosity acts as more of a protective factor for Blacks than Whites overall. Little research is available on Hispanic adolescents, religion, and delinquency.

### Religion and Delinquency

The large majority of the studies that have looked at religiosity and delinquency have found some sort of negative relationship between the two (Regnerus & Elder, 2003; Chadwick & Top, 1993). While there continues to be speculation as to the reasoning behind this relationship,

most researchers will agree that religiosity does appear to have a deterring effect on juvenile delinquency—even if indirectly. Many studies suggest that if religiosity is a deterrent to delinquent behavior that the deterrence is only against minor offenses such as drug and alcohol use, truancy, runaway, petty theft, and others (Simons, Simons, & Conger, 2004; Regenrus and Elder, 2003). For example, Burkett and White (1974) found a relatively strong relationship between religiosity and substance abuse (alcohol and marijuana specifically).

It is unclear as to why religiosity may be more influential in deterring juveniles from minor delinquent behavior as opposed to more serious delinquent behavior. Perhaps parental monitoring, peer influence, family structure, and socioeconomic status directly or indirectly have an effect on more serious delinquency; however, more research looking at these various intersections will be needed to identify the exact causal relationships. While little research has shown a strong relationship between religion and more serious crimes, the relationship between religiosity and minor offenses should not be ignored.

As the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention details, the highest number of juvenile arrests result from property index crimes—comprising over 20% of all juvenile arrests in 2008 (Puzzanchera, 2009). These data suggest that a large percentage of crimes committed by juveniles are, in fact, minor offenses thus giving more weight to the influential factor of religiosity. If religiosity is as strong of a deterrent for minor offenses as the literature suggests, it would appear evident that religiosity may play a much larger role in the area of juvenile delinquency than the literature leads on. As Bahr, Maughan, Marcos, Li (1998) explain religion provides a supportive and protective network, attachment to something that gives life more meaning, religious teachings against immorality, and promotes family unity. All of these

factors could provide protection and deterrence to adolescents against delinquency. Bahr et al. (1998) is by far not the only group of researchers to suggest these possible direct and indirect results from adolescent religiosity. As seen in the literature on gender and religiosity, specifically, socialization may also play a role in the reasoning behind the influential nature of religiosity (Gauthier et al., 2006).

Though the research available on delinquency and religion is limited already, the research that does exist primarily looks at at-risk adolescents. One study in particular, looked at the effects of religiosity on lower-risk adolescents and found that even amongst lower risk adolescents, the effects of low church attendance and lower levels of religiosity can be felt (Regnerus and Elder, 2003). Regnerus and Elder (2003) explain that despite the advantages that these lower-risk adolescents enjoy as opposed to more at-risk youth, the lower levels of religiosity and church attendance still increased the vulnerability of youth to delinquent activities such as drug use. This finding suggests that religiosity may also be influential for adolescents who are seen to be less vulnerable and less likely to commit delinquency acts. Just as all crime is not committed by the less fortunate, the influence of religiosity is not necessarily based on income level, neighborhood, family structure, peer groups, or any other influential factor that may be altered due to being disadvantaged.

Further, although the majority of American adolescents do participate in religious activities: prayer, church attendance, youth group, and/or hold some high regard for religiosity to some varying degree, a smaller percentage do not value religion or religious activities or find them valuable to their lives as a whole (Smith et al., 2003). Longitudinal data show that these percentages have been relatively stable over the last couple of decades (Smith et al., 2003). With

regard to juvenile delinquency, rates have fluctuated over the last couple of decades; however, the number of arrests for property index offenses has remained relatively stable until the last couple of years when these arrests began to slowly decline (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, n.d.).

Religious institutions and leaders teach morality and ethics while teaching religious members to have faith, be hopeful and abide by laws and moral codes. If one is strongly affiliated with these moral rules and codes then it would seem likely that they would be less likely to go against these moral rules and codes thus less likely to participate in delinquent acts. Given this ideology, it would seem plausible that there would be a negative relationship between religiosity and delinquency overall. While this relationship between religiosity and juvenile delinquency has certainly been shown, the complexity of this relationship has yet to be untangled. This study will contribute to this area of research and hopefully help to clarify this puzzling relationship between juvenile delinquency and religiosity.

## **CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE**

### Social Control Theory

Travis Hirschi developed the control theory which seeks to explain the varying power of social control. The strength or weakness of social power, according to Hirschi, is dependent on social attachment, commitment to legitimate opportunity, involvement in legitimate activities, and belief in conventional morality. Hirschi (1969) explained that one's conformity to social norms or one's conformity to deviance depends on the ties an individual has in these four areas. In other words, an adolescent may turn to crime (or deviance) if they had weak social attachments, lacked confidence or direction, neglected to busy themselves with positive activities, and/or did not have an established belief with instilled morality and respect (Hirschi, 1969).

When looking at delinquency and religion, it is clear to see why this theory can be applied to this relationship. Given the importance of belief (honesty, morality, responsibility, religion, etc.) within the social control theory it would make sense that, without this central piece, one might stray away from moral or conventional behaviors. In terms of juvenile delinquency, Hirschi would explain that an adolescent lacking religiosity or the components of 'belief' would be more susceptible to committing deviant behavior or delinquency. This ideology pairs with the common finding that religiosity has an inverse relationship with juvenile delinquency.

As studies have proposed, there are many factors that may be influential in promoting offending among juveniles including: living arrangements (i.e. two-parent household versus single-parent household, neighborhood, divorce, etc.), peers, family structure, parental



monitoring, self-care, as well as many more possible related factors (Griffin et al., 2000; Church et al., 2008; Frey et al., 2009; De Kemp et al., 2006; Anderson, 2002; Burt et al., 2008; Selfhout and Branje, 2008). Given these possible negative influences, it is important to explore all possible deterrents to juvenile offending. One possible deterrent that has been under-researched is the effect of religiosity amongst youth.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: METHOD**

For this study, data were used from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health Wave I Public Use Data (Add Health) to test the relationships discussed in the previous chapters. This data was derived from a nationally representative sample of 7<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> graders in the United States during the 1994-1995 school year. The participants were interviewed three times, the most recent interview being in 2001-2002 when the participants were between 18 and 26 years of age; however, the data used here were drawn from the first interviews when the participants were between the ages of 12 and 21 years old with the majority of respondents being between the ages of 14-18 years old. This data set includes information on a large variety of topics; however, the data used for this study was specifically drawn from questions centered on delinquent behavior, religious variables, demographic variables, as well as social control variables. Three hypotheses will be tested:

1. Adolescents with stronger religious ties will be less likely to participate in delinquent behavior.
2. Females who are religious will commit fewer delinquent acts than females who are not religious and males who are religious will commit fewer delinquent acts than males who are not religious.
3. Blacks will be more religiously active followed by Hispanics, Whites, and Other Race. Also, Blacks who are religious will commit fewer delinquent acts than Blacks who are not religious, Hispanics who are religious will commit fewer delinquent acts than Hispanics who are not religious, Whites who are religious will commit fewer delinquent acts than Whites who are

not religious, and Other Races who are religious will commit fewer delinquent acts than Other Races who are not religious.

To test these hypotheses, multivariate analyses were conducted with SPSS statistical software. Due to the nature of the sampling method all multivariate analyses were performed using the complex samples add-on module in SPSS with the appropriate weights. OLS regression was used to predict both violent and non-violent delinquency by gender, age, race/ethnicity, social control factors, and religious factors. Also, correlations were conducted with the delinquency scales and the religion variables. It is important to note that the correlations are unweighted as SPSS complex samples add-on module does not offer the feature of running correlations while using the weights. All measurements and variable recodes are explained below in the measurements section..

### Measurements Section

#### Gender Variables

Gender was coded as follows: male=0, female=1.

#### Age Variable

Age was computed by taking the interviewee's birth year from the year of the interview.

#### Delinquency Variables

To measure delinquency, fifteen delinquency variables were recoded and used. The delinquency variables were asked as follows: "In the past 12 months how often did you...paint graffiti or signs on someone else's property or in a public place, deliberately damage property that didn't belong to you, lie to your parents about where you had been/who with, take something

from a store without paying for it, get into a serious physical fight, hurt someone badly enough to need bandages or care from a doctor or nurse, run away from home, drive a car without its owner's permission, steal something worth more than \$50, go into a house or building to steal something, use or threaten to use a weapon to get something from someone, sell marijuana or other drugs, steal something worth less than \$50, take part in a fight where a group of your friends was against another group, and loud, rowdy, or unruly in a public place.

The following two scales were created with these variables: the Violent Scale which included only violent acts (serious physical fight, hurt someone, use or threaten weapon, and group fight), and the Non-Violent Scale which included only non-violent acts (graffiti, damage property, lie to parents, steal, drive car without permission, steal worth more than \$50, burglary, sell drugs, steal worth less than \$50, loud in public place). Each individual variable was recoded as a dummy variable before combining them together to create each scale (0=never participated in activity, 1=participated in activity to some degree). The Violent Scale has a possible range of 0-4, 0= respondent did not participate in any (violent) delinquent activities and 4= respondent participated in all (violent) delinquent activities. The actual range of participation in violent delinquency amongst the respondents was also 0-4: 0 (59.2%), 1 (19.6%), 2 (11.8%), 3 (7.7%), and 4 (1.7%) with the average being .73 violent delinquent acts. The Non-Violent Scale has a possible range of 0-11, 0= respondent did not participate in any (non-violent) delinquent activities and 11= respondent participated in all (non-violent) delinquent activities. The actual range for the Non-Violent scale was also 0-11: 0 (27.7%), 1 (23.7%), 2 (17.9%), 3 (10.7%), 4 (7.5%), 5 (4.8 %), 6 (3.4%), 7 (2%), 8 (1.2%), 9 (.7%), 10 (.4%), and 11 (.2%) with the average being 2 non-violent delinquent acts.

## Race Variables

The race variable was asked as follows: “What is your race? You may give more than one answer.” The answer options were given as follows: White, Black or African American, American Indian or Native American, Asian or Pacific Islander, and Other. In order to create the White, Black, Hispanic, and Other categories, the respondents who only marked one race were put into that racial category (i.e. All those who only marked “White” were put into the “White” category). For the ease of analyses and since the large majority of respondents chose only one race, only respondents who indicated on racial category were included (6182 respondents or 95% of sample included). Then based on the question, “Are you of Hispanic or Latino origin?” with the following as response categories “no or yes,” new racial/ethnic groups were formed: White Hispanic, Black Hispanic, American Indian Hispanic, Asian Hispanic, Other Hispanic, White Non-Hispanic, Black Non-Hispanic, American Indian Non-Hispanic, Asian Non-Hispanic, Other Non-Hispanic. From these categories, all respondents who claimed to be Hispanic of some form were placed into the “Hispanic” category leaving the following racial/ethnic categories: White(Non-Hispanic), Black (Non-Hispanic), Hispanic (all Hispanic), and Other.

## Social Control Variables

### Activity Scale

Based on Hirschi’s Social Control Theory, the more ties that one has to the community, their family, and a social network, the less likely one is to be deviant. Drawing from this principle, it would seem likely that the more active one is in conventional activities, the less likely one is to commit delinquent acts. An activity scale was created from seven variables

including: work around the house, do hobbies, watch tv, rollerblading/roller-skating/skateboarding/bicycling, active sport, exercise, and hangout with friends. The Activities Scale ranged from 0-7, zero indicating that the respondent did not participate in any of the listed activities and seven indicating that the respondent had participated in all of the listed activities. The seven activity questions were all asked as follows, “During the past week, how often did you...” and were given the following answer options: 0=Not at all, 1= one or two times, 2= three or four times, and 3= five or more times. To create the activities scale, each variable was coded as a dummy variable (0= did not participate in activity, 1=participated in activity to some degree) and then they were added together.

#### Family, friends, school

Another variable used to measure social control within this study included a question centered on social acceptance. The statement read as follows: “You feel socially accepted” and the response categories were recoded to reflect the following: “1=Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neither Agree or Disagree, 4= Agree, and 5=Strongly Agree.” This variable has been included in an effort to measure how perceived social acceptance influences involvement in juvenile delinquency.

To encompass perceived social acceptance, feeling of belonging, and perceived involvement, a variable was used to measure how much the respondent felt connected to their school. The statement read, “You feel like you are part of your school” and the responses were recoded to reflect the following response categories: “1=Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neither Agree or Disagree, 4= Agree, and 5=Strongly Agree.” Someone with hopes to go to college likely has conventional ties to society and general belief in societal norms. Based on this,

it would seem important to measure whether or not one's feelings towards college have an impact on one's choices to commit delinquent acts. The variable used to measure this read as follows: "On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is low and 5 is high, how much do you want to go to college?"

### Religion Variables

To measure the influence of religion on juvenile delinquency, four religion variables were recoded and used. The first two variables, church attendance and youth church activity, were asked in the following format: "In the past 12 months, how often did you... 1. attend religious services (church attendance) and 2. attend such youth activities (youth church activity-examples given: youth groups, bible classes or choir). These variables were recoded so that higher frequency of attendance reflected higher numerical values (1=never, 2=less than once a month, 3= once a month or more, but less than once a week, 4=once a week or more).

The next religion variable importance of religion was asked in the following format: "How important is religion to you?" and the recoded response options are as follows: 1= not important at all, 2=fairly unimportant, 3=fairly important, 4=very important.

The final religion variable prayer frequency was asked in the following format: "How often do you pray?" and the recoded response options are as follows: 1=never, 2=less than once a month, 3= at least once a month, 4= at least once a week, 5= at least once a day.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: RESULTS**

Table 1: Sample Characteristics Table

The sample consisted of 6504 respondents from the ages of 12-21 years old, most respondents falling between the 14-18 years age range. The sample was nearly split in half with males making up 51.6% and females comprising 48.4% of the sample. Approximately half of the respondents were White, while approximately a quarter of the respondents were Black and approximately a tenth of the population Hispanic. Other Race made up about 4% of the sampled population and included all respondents who indicated that they were multiracial but not of a Hispanic background.

On average, the respondents claimed to participate in 2.78 delinquent activities overall, approximately 2 non-violent delinquent acts, and less than one (.73) violent activity. For this sample, the average church attendance is more than once a month but less than once a week, religion is fairly important, frequency of prayer is between once a day to once a week (closer to once a day), and attendance at youth church activities is less than once a month. Out of the seven activities, the respondents participated in an average of 5.5 activities. Out of a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high) respondents gave an average of approximately 4 with regards to how much they want to go to college. Respondents fell between 'neither agree or disagree' and 'agree' in terms of feeling a part of one's school and responses indicate that, on average, the respondents agree to feeling socially accepted.



Table 1: Sample Characteristics

<b>Table 1: Sample Characteristics</b>		
Total # of Respondents:	6504	
Age	16 years old	
% Male	51.6%	
% Female	48.4%	
% White Non-Hispanic	57.2%	
% Black Non-Hispanic	22.5%	
% Hispanic	10.3%	
% Other Race	4.5%	
	<b>Mean</b>	<b>S.D.</b>
Importance of Religion	3.36	.76
Church Attendance	3.02	1.06
Prayer Frequency	3.97	1.28
Youth Church Activity	2.23	1.24
Number of Activities	5.52	1.14
Want to go to college	4.44	1.03
Social Acceptance	4.09	.077
Feel a part of one's school	3.85	1.01
Delinquency Scale	2.74	2.74
Non-Violent Scale	2.01	2.1
Violent Scale	0.73	1.05

### Correlations

Table 2

To begin the analyses, first correlations were conducted between each of the delinquency scales, the delinquency variables, and the religion variables. First, bivariate correlations were conducted between the non-violent delinquency scale and each religion variable. Following, the

violent delinquency scale was correlated with each religion variable. Finally, correlations were conducted between each delinquency variable (15 total) and each religion variable. These results can be seen in Table 2.

### Delinquency Scales and Religion Variables

All of the correlations with the exception of the relationship between the violent scale and youth church activity were significant ( $p < .001$ ). Also, all relationships were negative indicating that the more importance placed on religious acts and higher frequency of religious acts was associated with fewer non-violent and violent delinquent acts. The strongest correlation seen for the non-violent scale was the negative relationship between it and the importance of religion ( $-.166, p < .001$ ). The strongest correlation for the violent scale was seen between it and church activity ( $-.083, p < .001$ ).

### Non-Violent Delinquent Variables and Religion Variables

Of the 44 correlations conducted here, only three were found not to be significant at all: driving a car without owner's permission and church activity, driving a car without owner's permission and prayer frequency, and acting unruly or rowdy in a public place and youth church activity. All relationships found here with the exception of two (stealing something worth less than \$50 and church activity, and acting unruly and rowdy in a public place and youth church activity (which was not statistically significant) were negative again indicating that, overall, the more importance placed on religious acts and higher frequency of religious acts decreases the number of non-violent delinquent acts. Of these correlations, the strongest negative relationship

found was between selling marijuana and importance of religion ( $-.134, p<.001$ ) suggesting that when more importance is placed on religion the frequency of selling marijuana decreases.

#### Violent Delinquent Variables and Religion Variables

Sixteen correlations were conducted between each of the violent delinquency variables and each of the religion variables. Two correlations were not statistically significant: serious fight and youth church activity, and group fight and youth church activity. All relationships found here were negative supporting the previous findings that more importance placed on religion and higher frequency of religious acts (prayer, church attendance, and youth church activity) were associated with less violent delinquent acts.

Table 2: Delinquency and Religion Variables (Correlations)

<b>Table 2: Delinquency Variables and Religion Variables</b>				
	Church Activity	Prayer Frequency	Importance of Religion	Youth Church Activity
<b>Non-Violent Scale</b>	-.166***	-.110***	-.092***	-.083***
<b>Violent Scale</b>	-.083***	-.071***	-.073***	-.031*
<b>Non-Violent Delinquency:</b>				
Graffiti	-.048**	-.048***	-.073***	-.040**
Damage Property	-.066***	-.085***	-.127***	-.046***
Lie to Parents	-.037**	-.071***	-.092***	-.042**
Steal from Store	-.072***	-.078***	-.106***	-.059***
Run Away	-.059***	-.054***	-.088***	-.048***
Drive Car w/o Permission	-.025	-.025	-.044***	-.036**
Steal Worth >\$50	-.050***	-.061***	-.080***	-.045***
Go into house to steal	-.036**	-.047***	-.069***	-.042**
Sell Marijuana	-.076***	-.063***	-.134***	-.074***
Steal Worth <\$50	.057***	-.079***	-.102***	-.063***
Act Unruly in Public	-.045***	-.043***	-.089***	.025
<b>Violent Delinquency:</b>				
Serious Fight	-.084***	-.082***	-.046***	-.023
Hurt Someone Badly	-.054***	-.055***	-.061***	-.030*
Use or Threaten Weapon	-.039**	-.033*	-.029*	-.032*
Group Fight	-.056***	-.034*	-.064***	-.013

\*\*\*  $p < .001$

\*\*  $p < .01$

\*  $p < .05$

Notes:

1. High values equal high responses (e.g. Importance of Religion: High importance equals high numerical value)
2. High values equal high frequency (e.g. Church Attendance: High attendance equals high numerical value)
3. Non-Violent Delinquency Scale= 0-11: 0= participated in 0 non-violent delinquent acts 11= participated in all
4. Violent Delinquency Scale= 0-4: 0= participated in 0 violent delinquent acts 4= participated in all

Table 3

To take the results above a step further and address the research questions regarding gender, bivariate correlations were conducted between the delinquency scales (non-violent and violent) and the religion variables separately for males and females. Overall, the relationships were stronger for females than for males. The results for these tests can be found in Table 3.

#### Non-Violent Scale and Religion Variables (Female)

All of the relationships between the non-violent scale and the religion variables for females were statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ) and all were negative. These findings suggest that, for females, religion is relevant when discussing influential factors and non-violent delinquency. While none of the relationships were particularly strong, the strongest relationship found here was between the non-violent scale and church activity ( $-.173$ ,  $p < .001$ ) indicating that church activity may have more influence than the other religion variables.

#### Non-Violent Scale and Religion Variables (Male)

Like the results for females, all of the relationships found between the non-violent scale and the religion variables for males were statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ) and all were negative. Again, these results suggest that more importance placed on religion and higher frequency of religious acts (prayer, church attendance, and youth church activity) decrease the number of non-

violent acts for males. Overall, the correlation coefficients for males were weaker than those for females; however, the strongest relationship found here was also between the non-violent scale and church activity ( $-.148, p < .001$ ).

#### Violent Scale and Religion Variables (Female)

Overall, the results for the correlations conducted between the violent scale and religion variables for females were weak. All of the relationships here with the exception of one (violent scale and youth church activity) were statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) and all relationships were negative. Again, the results were not very strong; however, the negative relationships do signify that religion is playing an influential role, even if on a small scale. The strongest negative relationship seen here is between the violent scale and church activity ( $-.092, p < .001$ ).

#### Violent Scale and Religion Variables (Male)

As with the previous results for females, the resulting correlations between the violent scale and the religion variables for males were not as strong as the previous non-violent results. Similar to the female results, all of the relationships here with the exception of one (violent scale and youth church activity) were statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) and all were negative. The strongest relationship, which is not particularly strong, was found between the violent scale and the religion variables for males was again between the violent scale and church activity ( $-.061, p < .01$ ).

Table 3: Delinquency and Religion Variables by Gender (Correlations)

<b>Table 3: Delinquency Variables and Religion Variables</b>				
	Church Activity	Prayer Frequency	Importance of Religion	Youth Church Activity
<b>Non-Violent Scale</b>				
Females	-.173***	-.126***	-.110***	-.083***
Males	-.148***	-.078***	-.069***	-.072***
<b>Violent Scale:</b>				
Females	-.092***	-.049**	-.058**	-.017
Males	-.061**	-.058**	-.040*	-.019

\*\*\* p< .001

\*\* p< .01

\* p< .05

Notes:

1. High values equal high responses (e.g. Importance of Religion: High importance equals high numerical value)
2. High values equal high frequency (e.g. Church Attendance: High attendance equals high numerical value)
3. Non-Violent Delinquency Scale= 0-11: 0= participated in 0 non-violent delinquent acts 11= participated in all
4. Violent Delinquency Scale= 0-4: 0= participated in 0 violent delinquent acts 4= participated in all

### Regression

Table 4: Non-Violent Regression

To predict the number of non-violent delinquent acts, a three-model multiple linear regression was calculated. The first model considered the non-violent delinquency scale as the dependent variable and the following demographic variables as independent variables: gender (female), race/ethnicity (Black, Hispanic, and Other Race), and age. The second model included the previous demographic variables while adding social control variables (activity scale, social acceptance, desire to go to college, and feeling part of one's school). The third model included the above demographic variables and social control variables while adding religion variables (importance of religion, church attendance, prayer frequency, and youth church activity).

### Model 1

A multiple linear regression was calculated predicting the number of non-violent delinquent acts based on gender, race/ethnicity, and age. For this model, gender ( $p < .001$ ) and Hispanic ( $p < .05$ ) were significant; however, gender was negatively associated with non-violent delinquency while Hispanic was positively associated. These results indicated that females committed less non-violent acts than males while Hispanics committed more non-violent delinquent acts than Whites. For this first model,  $R^2$  accounted for only 0.012 of variance within the dependent variable, non-violent delinquency.

### Model 2

A multiple linear regression was calculated predicting the number of non-violent delinquent acts based on gender, race/ethnicity, age, activity scale, social acceptance, desire to go to college, and feeling a part of one's school. The statistically significant variables included gender ( $p < .001$ ), activities ( $p < .01$ ), social acceptance ( $p < .001$ ), desire to go to college ( $p < .001$ ), and feeling part of one's school ( $p < .01$ ). Based on these findings, males committed more non-violent delinquent acts than females. Those who feel socially accepted, have a greater desire to go to college, and feel connected to one's school committed fewer non-violent delinquent acts than those who feel socially unaccepted, have a lower desire to go to college, feel disconnected from one's school. Number of activities ( $b = .069$ ) was found to be positively associated with non-violent delinquent acts indicating that those who participated in a greater number of activities committed more non-violent delinquent acts than those with a fewer number of activities. With adding, the social control variables, the  $R^2$  changed from 0.012 in the first model to 0.046 in the second model.



### Model 3

A multiple linear regression was calculated predicting the number of non-violent delinquent acts based on gender, race/ethnicity, age, social acceptance, desire to go to college, feeling a part of one's school, importance of religion, frequency of prayer, church attendance, and religious youth activity. For this model, gender ( $p < .001$ ), Hispanic ( $p < .01$ ), other race ( $p < .01$ ), social acceptance ( $p < .01$ ), desire to go to college ( $p < .001$ ), connectedness to one's school ( $p < .001$ ), and importance of religion ( $p < .001$ ) were found to be statistically significant. Again, results here indicate that males committed more non-violent delinquent acts than females while those who feel socially accepted, have a higher desire to go to college, feel connected to one's school, and place higher importance on religion committed fewer non-violent delinquent acts than those who feel socially unaccepted, do not want to go to college, feel disconnected from one's school, and place less importance on religion. Hispanic and Other Race were positively associated with the non-violent delinquency scale which indicated that those within the Other Race and Hispanic racial/ethnic categories committed more non-violent delinquent acts than Whites. The  $R^2$  coefficient rose only from 0.046 in the second model to 0.064 in the third model.

Table 4: Non-Violent Scale Regression

<b>Table 4: Non-Violent Scale Regression Results</b>						
	<b>Model 1</b>		<b>Model 2</b>		<b>Model 3</b>	
<b>Variables</b>	<b>b</b>	<b>s.e.</b>	<b>b</b>	<b>s.e.</b>	<b>b</b>	<b>s.e.</b>
Female	-.423***	.064	-.429***	.067	-.334***	.064
Black	-.129	.092	-.039	.090	.137	.085
Hispanic	.210*	.106	.190	.105	.275**	.102
Other Race	.242	.143	.263	.142	.427**	.157
Age	.016	.020	.004	.019	.008	.020
	R <sup>2</sup> = 0.012					
Activities			.069**	.025	.099	.033
Social Acceptance			-.253***	.045	-.240**	.050
Want to go to college?			-.240***	.034	-.180***	.037
Feel part of school?			-.116**	.042	-.085***	.044
	R <sup>2</sup> = 0.046					
Importance of Religion					-.416***	.061
Prayer Frequency					.027	.042
Church Attendance					-.111	.117
Religious Youth Activity					-.027	.032
	R <sup>2</sup> = .064					
N	6059		5921		5160	

Notes:

1. White= White Non-Hispanic, Black= Black Non-Hispanic, Hispanic= Any form of Hispanic, and Other Race= All races/ethnicities outside of White, Black, and Hispanic
2. Activities Scale: Range: 0-7, 0= did not participate in any listed activities 7= participated in all listed activities
3. High values equal high responses (e.g. Social acceptance: High social acceptance equals high numerical value)
4. High values equal high frequency (e.g. Church Attendance: High attendance equals high numerical value)

Table 5: Violent Regression

To predict the number of violent delinquent acts, a three-model multiple linear regression was calculated. The same three-model strategy with the same corresponding variables was in place for predicting violent delinquent acts as was used to predict non-violent delinquent acts.

#### Model 1

A multiple linear regression was calculated predicting the number of violent delinquent acts based on gender, race/ethnicity, and age. For this model, gender ( $p < .001$ ), Black ( $p < .001$ ), Hispanic ( $p < .001$ ), and age ( $p < .001$ ) were significant. As seen in previous results, these results also suggest that males ( $b = -.446$ ) committed more violent delinquent acts than females. Also, age ( $b = -.041$ ) was found to be negatively associated with violent delinquent acts as well indicating that older respondents committed fewer violent delinquent acts. Black and Hispanic respondents committed more violent delinquent acts than Whites.

#### Model 2

A multiple linear regression was calculated predicting the number of violent delinquent acts based on gender, race/ethnicity, age, activity scale, social acceptance, desire to go to college, and feeling a part of one's school. The statistically significant variables included gender ( $p < .001$ ), Black ( $p < .001$ ), Hispanic ( $p < .001$ ), age ( $p < .001$ ), activities ( $p < .01$ ), social acceptance ( $p < .05$ ), desire to go to college ( $p < .001$ ), and feeling part of one's school ( $p < .001$ ). As shown in Table 5, males ( $b = -.418$ ) committed more violent delinquent acts than females and older respondents committed fewer violent delinquent acts. Social acceptance, desire to go to college, and connectedness to one's school were all negatively associated with violent delinquency

suggesting that those who feel socially accepted, have a desire to go to college, and feel connected to one's school committed fewer violent delinquent acts than those who feel socially unaccepted, do not want to go to college, and feel disconnected from one's school. Black ( $b = .378$ ), Hispanic ( $b = .247$ ), and number of activities ( $b = .039$ ) were found to be positively associated with violent delinquency indicating that those who are of a Black racial background or a Hispanic ethnic background committed more violent delinquent acts than Whites while those involved in a higher number of activities also committed more violent delinquent acts than those with a fewer number of activities. The  $R^2$  coefficient changed from 0.065 in the first model to 0.093 in this model.

### Model 3

A multiple linear regression was calculated predicting the number of violent delinquent acts based on gender, race/ethnicity, age, social acceptance, desire to go to college, feeling a part of one's school, importance of religion, frequency of prayer, church attendance, and religious youth activity. Unlike previous models, social acceptance was not found to be statistically significant. For this model, gender ( $p < .001$ ), Black ( $p < .001$ ), Hispanic ( $p < .01$ ), other race ( $p < .05$ ), age ( $p < .001$ ), activities ( $p < .01$ ), desire to go to college ( $p < .001$ ), connectedness to one's school ( $p < .001$ ), importance of religion ( $p < .05$ ), and frequency of prayer ( $p < .001$ ) were found to be statistically significant. As seen previously, results found here indicate that males ( $b = -.397$ ) committed more violent delinquent acts than females and older respondents committed fewer violent delinquent acts. Those who have a desire to go to college, feel connected to one's school, place higher importance on religion, and pray more frequently committed fewer violent delinquent acts than those who do not want to go to college, feel disconnected to one's school,

place less importance on religion, and pray less. Black ( $b = .400$ ), Hispanic ( $b = .281$ ), and other race ( $b = .166$ ) respondents committed a greater number of violent delinquent acts compared to Whites and those who participated in a higher number of activities ( $b = .043$ ) committed more violent delinquent acts than those with a fewer number of activities. The  $R^2$  for this model only changed from 0.093 in the previous model to 0.095 in this model.

Table 5: Violent Scale Regression

<b>Table 5: Violent Scale Regression Results</b>						
<b>Variables</b>	<b>Model 1</b>		<b>Model 2</b>		<b>Model 3</b>	
	<b>b</b>	<b>s.e.</b>	<b>b</b>	<b>s.e.</b>	<b>b</b>	<b>s.e.</b>
Female	-.446***	.031	-.418***	.030	-.397***	.031
Black <sup>1</sup>	.344***	.062	.378***	.057	.400***	.056
Hispanic	.261***	.059	.247***	.059	.281***	.062
Other Race	.074	.071	.077	.071	.166*	.076
Age	-.041***	.011	-.049***	.011	-.047***	.011
	$R^2 = .065$					
Activities			.039**	.014	.043**	.015
Social Acceptance			-.050*	.024	-.039	.025
Want to go to college?			-.082***	.017	-.066***	.018
Feel part of school?			-.122***	.020	-.106***	.021
	$R^2 = .093$					
Importance of Religion					-.059*	.028
Prayer Frequency					-.072***	.018
Church Attendance					-.002	.014
Religious Youth Activity					.014	.016
	$R^2 = .095$					
N	6082		5940		5175	

Notes:

1. White= White Non-Hispanic, Black= Black Non-Hispanic, Hispanic= Any form of Hispanic, and Other Race= All races/ethnicities outside of White, Black, and Hispanic
2. Activities Scale: Range: 0-7, 0= did not participate in any listed activities 7= participated in all listed activities
3. High values equal high responses (e.g. Social acceptance: High social acceptance equals high numerical value)

4. High values equal high frequency (e.g. Church Attendance: High attendance equals high numerical value)

### Gender (Table 6)

To address the research questions regarding gender OLS regressions were considered separately for males and females (Table 6) using the non-violent delinquency scale and violent delinquency scale as the dependent variables and the following variables as independent variables: race/ethnicity, age, activities, social acceptance, feeling part of one's school, desire to go to college, importance of religion, church attendance, frequency of prayer, and youth church activity. This multiple linear regression equation was conducted for males and females using the violent and non-violent delinquency scales to predict number of violent and non-violent acts committed per males and females.

#### Table 6

##### Non-Violent Delinquency (Males)

As seen in Table 6, statistically significant predictors were activities ( $p < .001$ ), social acceptance ( $p < .001$ ), feeling a part of one's school ( $p < .001$ ), and importance of religion ( $p < .001$ ). Much like the previous results with the entire sample, social acceptance ( $b = -.274$ ), feeling part of one's school ( $b = -.223$ ), and importance of religion ( $b = -.465$ ) were found to have negative associations to non-violent delinquency while activities ( $b = .170$ ) had a positive association. These results suggested that males who feel socially accepted, feel part of one's school and place a higher importance on religion committed fewer non-violent delinquent acts than males who feel socially unaccepted, feel disconnected from one's school, and place less importance on religion. The only race/ethnic variable that had statistical significance was Other

Race ( $b = .504$ ) which indicated that those within this racial category committed more non-violent delinquent acts than Whites.

#### Violent Delinquency (Males)

When predicting violent delinquent acts by males, the following statistically significant variables were found: Black ( $p < .001$ ), Hispanic ( $p < .05$ ), age ( $p < .05$ ), activities ( $p < .01$ ), school connectedness ( $p < .05$ ), desire to go to college ( $p < .01$ ), and importance of religion ( $p < .05$ ). Based on the results, age was found to have a negative relationship with violent delinquent acts indicating that older males committed less violent delinquent acts. Also, feeling part of one's school, desire to go to college, and importance of religion were all found to be negatively associated with violent delinquency indicating that males who feel connected to one's school, want to go to college, and place higher importance on religion committed fewer violent delinquent acts than males who feel socially unaccepted, do not want to go to college, and place less importance on religion. Black, Hispanic, and number of number of activities were found to be positively associated to violent delinquency for males suggesting that males from Black and/or Hispanic backgrounds committed more violent delinquent acts than White males and males with a higher number of activities committed a greater number of violent delinquent acts than males involved in a fewer number of activities.

#### Non-Violent Delinquency (Female)

Based on the non-violent regression results for females, the statistically significant predictors were Black ( $p < .05$ ), Hispanic ( $p < .01$ ), social acceptance ( $p < .001$ ), feeling a part of one's school ( $p < .001$ ), importance of religion ( $p < .001$ ), and prayer frequency ( $p < .01$ ). Social

acceptance, school connectedness, importance of religion, and frequency of prayer were found to have negative associations with non-violent delinquency for females suggesting, much like previous results, that females who feel socially unaccepted, feel disconnected from one's school, place less importance on religion, and pray less committed more non-violent delinquent acts than females who feel socially accepted, feel connected to one's school place higher importance on religion, and pray more frequently. Black ( $b = .180$ ) and Hispanic ( $b = .489$ ) females committed more non-violent delinquent acts than White females.

#### Violent Delinquency (Female)

The regression results for females predicting violent delinquent acts found Black ( $p < .001$ ), Hispanic ( $p < .001$ ), age ( $p < .001$ ), school connectedness ( $p < .01$ ), desire to go to college ( $p < .001$ ), and church attendance ( $p < .001$ ) to be statistically significant. Age, school connectedness, desire to go to college, and church attendance all were found to have negative associations with the violent delinquency scale. Based on these findings, older females committed less violent delinquent acts than younger females. Also, females who feel connected to one's school, have a higher desire to go to college, and attend church committed fewer violent delinquent acts than those who feel disconnected to one's school, have a lower desire to go to college, and who do not attend church often or at all. Black and Hispanic females committed more violent delinquent acts than White females.



Table 6: Non-Violent and Violent Delinquency by Gender (Regression)

<b>Table 6: Predicting Violent and Non-Violent Delinquency by Gender</b>								
<u>Variables</u>	<b>Males</b>				<b>Females</b>			
	Non-Violent		Violent		Non-Violent		Violent	
	b	s.e.	b	s.e.	b	s.e.	b	s.e.
Black	.080	.126	.437***	.086	.180*	.090	.356***	.050
Hispanic	.051	.148	.230*	.102	.489**	.158	.322***	.078
Other Race	.504*	.214	.194	.134	.392	.236	.138	.107
Age	.045	.028	-.039*	.017	-.031	.024	-.055***	.011
Activities	.170***	.041	.067**	.023	.005	.033	.019	.015
Social Acceptance	-.274***	.078	-.038	.039	-.210***	.054	-.040	.030
Feel part of school?	-.223***	.066	-.073*	.031	-.136***	.041	-.061**	.022
Want to go to college?	-.082	.055	-.099**	.028	-.085	.062	-.119***	.026
Importance of Religion	-.465***	.105	-.103*	.049	-.307***	.081	-.009	.037
Church Attendance	.064	.065	-.056	.029	-.009	.049	-.095***	.021
Prayer Frequency	.017	.050	.016	.028	-.102**	.047	-.022	.024
Youth Church Activity	-.060	.048	.008	.025	.015	.038	.022	.016
N	5158		5175		5158		5175	

Notes:

1. White= White Non-Hispanic, Black= Black Non-Hispanic, Hispanic= Any form of Hispanic, and Other Race= All races/ethnicities outside of White, Black, and Hispanic
2. Activities Scale: Range: 0-7, 0= did not participate in any listed activities 7= participated in all listed activities
3. High values equal high responses (e.g. Social acceptance: High social acceptance equals high numerical value)
4. High values equal high frequency (e.g. Church Attendance: High attendance equals high numerical value)

## Race/Ethnicity (Table 7 & Table 8)

To address the research questions regarding race/ethnicity, multiple linear regressions were estimated separately for White, Black, Hispanic, and Other Race respondents (Table 6).

### Table 7

#### Predicting White Non-Violent Delinquent Behavior

The regression results predicting the number of non-violent acts for Whites found the following statistically significant variables: gender ( $p < .001$ ), activities ( $p < .05$ ), social acceptance ( $p < .001$ ), desire to go to college ( $p < .001$ ), and importance of religion ( $p < .001$ ). All statistically significant variables with the exception of number of activities were negatively associated to non-violent delinquent behavior indicating that White females ( $b = -.412$ ) committed fewer non-violent delinquent acts than White males. Also, Whites who feel socially accepted ( $b = -.254$ ), have a higher desire to go to college ( $b = -.211$ ), and place more importance on religion ( $b = -.490$ ) committed fewer non-violent delinquent acts than Whites who feel socially unaccepted, do not want to go to college, and place less importance on religion. On the other hand, Whites with a greater number of activities ( $.077$ ) committed more non-violent delinquent acts than Whites involved in a lower number of activities.

#### Predicting Black Non-Violent Delinquent Behavior

The following statistically significant variables were found for Blacks and non-violent delinquency: gender ( $p < .001$ ), activities ( $p < .05$ ), and frequency of prayer ( $p < .001$ ). Based on these findings, Black females ( $b = -.238$ ) committed fewer non-violent delinquent acts than Black males. Also, Blacks who pray frequently and have a lower number of activities committed fewer

non-violent delinquent acts than Blacks who pray less ( $b = -.231$ ) and who participate in a greater number of activities ( $b = .115$ ).

#### Predicting Hispanic Non-Violent Delinquent Behavior

The findings for Hispanic respondents included four statistically significant variables: activities ( $p < .05$ ,  $b = .191$ ), social acceptance ( $p < .05$ ,  $b = -.283$ ), feeling part of one's school ( $p < .01$ ,  $b = -.326$ ), and church attendance ( $p < .05$ ,  $b = -.215$ ). As seen previously, all variables except activities had negative associations with non-violent delinquency for Hispanic people. These findings explain that Hispanics who feel socially accepted, feel connected to one's school, and attend church more often committed fewer non-violent delinquent acts than Hispanics who feel socially unaccepted, feel disconnected to one's school, and attend church less. Again, the positive relationship found here between number of activities and non-violent delinquency predicts that Hispanics with a higher number of activities ( $b = .191$ ) committed more non-violent delinquency than Hispanics with a lower number of activities.

#### Predicting Other Race Non-Violent Delinquent Behavior

None of the findings for Other Race respondents and non-violent delinquent behavior were found to be statistically significant.

Table 7: Ethnicity/Race by Non-Violent Delinquency (Regression)

<b>Table 7: Ethnicity/Race by Non-Violent Scale Delinquency</b>								
	<b>Whites</b>		<b>Blacks</b>		<b>Hispanic</b>		<b>Other Race</b>	
Variables	b	s.e.	b	s.e.	b	s.e.	b	s.e.
Females	-.412***	.085	-.238*	.115	.064	.219	-.617	.325
Age	.011	.023	.048	.041	-.076	.059	-.016	.069
Activities	.077*	.033	.115*	.049	.191*	.079	-.163	.112
Social Acceptance	-.254***	.063	-.158	.094	-.283*	.132	-.129	.183
Want to go to college?	-.211***	.048	-.022	.089	-.164	.150	-.157	.188
Feel part of school?	-.035	.052	-.098	.079	-.326**	.108	-.202	.222
Importance of Religion	-.490***	.085	.035	.145	-.289	.162	.021	.190
Church Attendance	.080	.053	.068	.107	-.215*	.105	.069	.180
Prayer Frequency	-.009	.039	-.231***	.070	.048	.084	-.120	.140
Youth Church Activity	-.052	.038	-.021	.092	.083	.097	-.096	.128
	R <sup>2</sup> = .083		R <sup>2</sup> = .032		R <sup>2</sup> = .075		R <sup>2</sup> = .057	
N	5158		5158		5158		5158	

Notes:

1. White= White Non-Hispanic, Black= Black Non-Hispanic, Hispanic= Any form of Hispanic, and Other Race= All races/ethnicities outside of White, Black, and Hispanic
2. Activities Scale: Range: 0-7, 0= did not participate in any listed activities 7= participated in all listed activities
3. High values equal high responses (e.g. Social acceptance: High social acceptance equals high numerical value)
4. High values equal high frequency (e.g. Church Attendance: High attendance equals high numerical value)

Table 8

#### Predicting White Violent Delinquent Behavior

When predicting the number of violent delinquent acts for Whites, gender ( $p < .001$ ,  $b = -.397$ ), age ( $p < .001$ ,  $b = -.047$ ), activities ( $p < .05$ ,  $b = .046$ ), desire to go to college ( $p < .01$ ,  $b = -.079$ ), feeling part of one's school ( $p < .001$ ,  $b = -.097$ ), and church attendance ( $p < .001$ ,  $b = -.082$ ) were found to be statistically significant. All statistically significant results (excluding activities) were found to have negative associations with violent delinquency. These findings suggest that White females committed fewer violent delinquent acts than White males while Whites who have a higher desire to go to college, feel part of one's school, and attend church often committed less violent delinquent acts than Whites who do not want to go to college, feel disconnected from one's school, and attend church less. Whites who have a higher number of activities (.046) committed more violent delinquent acts than Whites who have a lower number of activities.

#### Predicting Black Violent Delinquent Behavior

For Black violent delinquency, only gender ( $p < .001$ ) was found to be statistically significant. Based on the negative relationship found between gender and violent delinquent behavior, Black females (-.465) committed fewer violent delinquent acts than Black males.

#### Predicting Hispanic Violent Delinquent Behavior

The regression results for Hispanic violent delinquent behavior found gender ( $p < .05$ ), age ( $p < .05$ ), feeling part of one's school ( $p < .01$ ), and church attendance ( $p < .01$ ) to be statistically significant. All statistically significant variables were found to have negative associations with violent delinquent behavior indicating that Hispanic females ( $b = -.302$ ) committed fewer violent

delinquent acts than Hispanic males and that older Hispanics ( $b = -.069$ ) committed less violent delinquent acts than younger Hispanics. Also, Hispanics that feel connected to one's school ( $b = -.168$ ) and attend church often ( $b = -.124$ ) committed fewer violent delinquent acts than Hispanics who feel disconnected from their school and attend church less.

#### Predicting Other Race Violent Delinquent Behavior

When predicting violent delinquent behavior for Other Race respondents, two statistically significant variables resulted: gender ( $p < .05$ ,  $b = -.417$ ) and importance of religion ( $p < .05$ ,  $b = -.227$ ). These results suggest that Other Race females committed fewer violent delinquent acts than Other Race males and Other Race individuals who place higher importance on religion committed fewer violent delinquent acts than Other Race individuals who place less importance on religion.

Table 8: Ethnicity/Race by Violent Delinquency (Regression)

<b>Table 8: Ethnicity/Race by Violent Scale Delinquency</b>								
	<b>Whites</b>		<b>Blacks</b>		<b>Hispanic</b>		<b>Other Race</b>	
Variables	b	s.e.	b	s.e.	b	s.e.	b	s.e.
Females	-.397***	.037	-.465***	.084	-.302*	.129	-.417*	.191
Age	-.047***	.013	-.031	.025	-.069*	.031	-.026	.035
Activities	.046*	.018	.043	.039	.036	.037	.029	.081
Social Acceptance	-.016	.033	-.069	.040	-.124	.070	.030	.121
Want to go to college?	-.079**	.024	-.056	.039	-.044	.066	.016	.084
Feel part of school?	-.097***	.026	-.093	.055	-.168**	.055	-.133	.118
Importance of Religion	-.062	.034	.015	.070	-.058	.090	-.227*	.100
Church Attendance	-.082***	.022	-.029	.046	-.124**	.047	.102	.076
Prayer Frequency	.013	.016	-.054	.044	-.010	.046	-.054	.064
Youth Church Activity	.009	.019	.032	.046	.038	.046	-.060	.074
	R <sup>2</sup> = .089		R <sup>2</sup> = .068		R <sup>2</sup> = .082		R <sup>2</sup> = .107	
N	5175		5175		5175		5175	

Notes:

1. White= White Non-Hispanic, Black= Black Non-Hispanic, Hispanic= Any form of Hispanic, and Other Race= All races/ethnicities outside of White, Black, and Hispanic
2. Activities Scale: Range: 0-7, 0= did not participate in any listed activities 7= participated in all listed activities
3. High values equal high responses (e.g. Social acceptance: High social acceptance equals high numerical value)
4. High values equal high frequency (e.g. Church Attendance: High attendance equals high numerical value)

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

Does religiosity deter juvenile delinquency? Here we have looked at religiosity differences, delinquency differences, and the differing influence that religiosity appears to have on delinquency based on one's race/ethnicity and gender. It does appear that religiosity acts as a deterrent of juvenile delinquency; however, the strength of this influence may be in question. While we cannot ignore the impact that religiosity has regardless as to the magnitude of that size, it may be helpful to look at other variables surrounding religiosity to see the bigger picture. Having said this, we were able to uncover several patterns and interesting findings with regards to religiosity and juvenile delinquency and how gender and race/ethnicity are intertwined into this complex phenomenon.

The majority of the sample pray at least once a day, go to church at least once a week, and place importance in religion; however, a large portion of the sample does not participate in youth religious activities while a smaller yet large portion attend these activities every week. Overall, religion appears to play a role in the lives of these respondents which is consistent with previous research (Smith & Pearce, 2003; Regnerus et al., 2003) that the majority of youth in the United States do affiliate with an organized religion and have some participation in religious activities.

**1<sup>st</sup> Hypothesis: Adolescents with stronger religious ties will be less likely to participate in delinquent behavior.**

The results reaffirmed much of what was found in previous studies regarding gender and juvenile delinquency. Based on the findings presented in this study, religiousness (as measured by: church attendance, importance of religion, youth church activity, and prayer frequency) was



found to be both negatively correlated and negatively associated with both non-violent delinquency and violent delinquency variables. From these findings, the first hypothesis stating that adolescents with stronger religious ties would be less likely to participate in delinquent behavior was supported.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Hypothesis: Females who are religious will commit fewer delinquent acts than females who are not religious and males who are religious will commit fewer delinquent acts than males who are not religious.**

Results indicate that this hypothesis was also supported. Females of all races/ethnicities committed less delinquent acts (both non-violent and violent) than males of all races/ethnicities. Overall, females claimed to be slightly more religiously active and find more importance in religion than males; however, the frequencies were close. While females may be more religious than males, these findings suggest that perhaps the gender gap is not as large as other studies have found. While, overall, females appear to be both more religious and less delinquent than males, it was found that religious females are even less delinquent than non-religious females. Religious females were found to commit less non-violent and violent delinquent acts than females who were not religious.

In every result of gender that was statistically significant, males were found to have committed more delinquent acts than females. These findings were even consistent across the race/ethnicity results as well indicating that males of all races/ethnicities committed more delinquent (both non-violent and violent) acts than females of all race/ethnicities. Similar to the findings for females, males who were religious committed fewer delinquent acts than males who

were not religious indicating that religiosity does appear to be a deterrent for both males and females.

This being said, the religion variables did seem to play a role, although perhaps a minor one, in delinquency between males and females. Overall, the religion variables were more relevant for females than they were for males suggesting that religion may be more of a deterring factor for females than for males.

**3<sup>rd</sup> Hypothesis: Blacks will be more religiously active followed by Hispanics, Whites, and Other Race. Also, Blacks who are religious will commit fewer delinquent acts than Blacks who are not religious, Hispanics who are religious will commit fewer delinquent acts than Hispanics who are not religious, Whites who are religious will commit fewer delinquent acts than Whites who are not religious, and Other Races who are religious will commit fewer delinquent acts than Other Races who are not religious.**

The third hypothesis was supported being that Blacks were found to be more religious overall and respondents of each race/ethnicity who were religious committed fewer delinquent acts than those who were not religious. In other words, Blacks who were religious committed fewer delinquent acts than Blacks who were not religious, and this was the same trend for all other races/ethnicities. As mentioned previously in the results, prayer was seen to be more relevant for Blacks than any of the other races/ethnicities while church attendance was seen more relevant for Hispanics and Whites than the other races/ethnicities. Importance of religion was found to be significant for Whites (non-violent delinquency) and Other Race (violent delinquency) indicating more differences in the protective natures of the different religion variables. Based on this sample, Blacks and Hispanics place more importance on religion, pray

more, have higher church attendance, and attend youth church activities more than Whites; however, several findings indicate that Blacks and Hispanics commit more of both non-violent and violent delinquent acts than Whites; therefore, the influence of religiosity must vary to some degree. This will be discussed more in the following section.

### Social Control

Social control variables were consistently relevant throughout the results. Social acceptance, feeling part of one's school, and desire to go to college were all negatively associated with both the non-violent and violent delinquency variables. As hypothesized, these social control variables did appear to have a deterring effect on delinquency and the impact of these variables seems to be strong and consistent. There was one social control variable that continuously resulted in a way that was not expected and that is the number of activities. It was hypothesized that, based on the social control theory, the greater number of activities would result in less delinquent acts. Drawing from the social control theory, the more one is committed to legitimate activities, the less likely one is to be deviant; however, these results did not support this aspect of the theory. This may be an area that needs to be reevaluated.

### Social Acceptance

Social acceptance was present in both of the 3-model regression analyses; however, this variable appeared more relevant in the non-violent delinquency scale. Social acceptance was found to have an influential role for Whites and Hispanics in terms of non-violent delinquency; however, social acceptance did not play a role in violent delinquency in terms of race/ethnicity. Also, social acceptance was pertinent for both males and females; however, only for non-violent

delinquency when looking specifically at gender. Based on these results, social acceptance certainly appears to play a role in juvenile delinquency overall and these analyses further supported this importance of attachment in Hirschi's social control theory.

#### Feeling a part of one's school

As with social acceptance, feeling a part of one's school was also relevant in both of the 3-model regression analyses. Unlike the social acceptance variable, feeling a part of one's school was found to be important to both males and females for both non-violent and violent delinquency. For non-violent delinquent acts, feeling a part of one's school was only relevant for Hispanics and for violent delinquent acts, it was relevant for Whites and Hispanics. Overall, feeling a part of one's school should definitely be looked at more closely as it appeared repeatedly as a pertinent influence in the findings presented here.

#### Desire to go to college

As with the previous social control variables, the desire to go to college was also found to be an important influential factor in both 3-model regression analyses. Interestingly, for both males and females, desire to go to college was only relevant for violent delinquency. In terms of race/ethnicity, desire to go to college was pertinent only for Whites on both the non-violent and violent delinquent scales. These findings were intriguing due to their specific nature of influence—violent delinquency and whites, particularly. Future research is needed to pinpoint the influence on violent delinquency and race/ethnicity.

## Activities

As explained, number of activities resulted in positive relationships with the delinquency variables across the board. This was an unexpected finding; however, more research would be needed to uncover exactly what these findings indicate. Perhaps more time watching television, playing video games, and other new-age recreational activities are not Hirschi's ideal legitimate activities per the social control theory. While I know research has been done on various activities involving new technology, it would be particularly interesting to see what research would reveal about these activities in terms of the social control theory and whether or not these activities can be considered 'legitimate activities.'

## Religion Variables

### Importance of Religion

Importance of religion was seen throughout the results as one of the more relevant predictors. Importance of religion was pertinent in both 3-model regression analyses resulting as the only statistically significant religion variable for non-violent delinquency and one of two statistically significant religion variables for violent delinquency. Importance of religion was found to be influential to both males and females; however, interestingly, this variable was found significant for males for both violent and non-violent delinquency and only for non-violent delinquency for females. This religion variable was only relevant to Whites when predicting racial/ethnic effects on non-violent delinquency and only for Other Race when predicting racial/ethnic effects on violent delinquency. Importance of religion was also found to be consistently influential in the correlation analyses as it was found statistically significant in all

instances. It is also important to note that this variable was only found to be negatively correlated with both non-violent and violent delinquent acts further supporting it as a deterrent to delinquency overall.

### Church Attendance

Unlike the previous variables, church attendance was not as present in the results as some of the other variables suggesting that the influence of church attendance may not be a great or it may be case specific. Church attendance was not found to be significant in either of the 3-model regression analyses but, when looking at gender only, it was only significant for females and violent delinquent acts. Church attendance had a bit more presence in the racial/ethnicity results, particularly for Hispanics (non-violent and violent) and Whites (violent only). The fact that church attendance was found to be significant for Hispanics for both types of delinquency is interesting and may be the first step in unveiling influential factors for Hispanic delinquency. When looking at the correlation results, although none of the findings were particularly strong in terms of gender, church attendance was found to be the strongest negative relationship of these findings. When looking at the effects on the delinquency variables individually, church attendance was significant for almost all of the delinquency variables; however, again, none of these findings were particularly strong. Of these findings, the non-violent scale and church attendance was found to be the strongest, followed by the violent scale and selling marijuana. These results may not uncover deep-rooted influence; however, it may be important to know that perhaps church attendance is not the best delinquency prevention tool. Many parents may force their children to attend church services in hopes that this attendance will produce good character

and prevent their children from troublesome behaviors; however, from these findings, it may be that this is not the most effective strategy.

### Prayer Frequency

Prayer frequency was found to be about as present in the findings as church attendance. Prayer frequency was found to be significant in one of the 3-model regression analyses being one of the only two religion variables that were found significant for violent delinquent acts. Prayer was also seen to be predictive of female non-violent delinquency and Black non-violent delinquency. Prayer is seen in the literature to be a private religious activity; therefore, it could be that private religiosity is more of a deterrent for Blacks than other forms of religiosity as also found by Fowler et al. (2008). For the correlations, as seen previously, the results were not particularly strong; however, prayer was seen to be slightly stronger for females in terms of non-violent delinquency but slightly stronger for males in terms of violent delinquency. It would appear that prayer frequency has a negative effect on delinquency overall; however, that these effects may also be case specific. From this study, prayer seems to be more of a protective influence for females and Blacks.

### Youth Church Activity

Participation in religious youth activities was seen to be less influential of the religion variables. Youth church activity was not present in the findings of either 3-model regression analyses nor was it found to be significant in predicting gender or racial/ethnic delinquent acts on either delinquency scale. The only significance this variable had was in the correlation results; however, even these results were weak. Based on these findings, youth church activity could be

seen as an ineffective preventative strategy in terms of juvenile delinquency; however, on average, the respondents only attended religious youth services less than once a month. It could be that attendance of these activities could be more influential but that the respondents were not influenced by this particular variable because their involvement in the activity was so small. Further research should look more closely at these activities to determine whether or not youth church activities are in fact ineffective at preventing delinquent acts or if the sample surveyed here was not suitable for showing any possible deterring nature of this variable.

#### What do these findings mean?

##### Religion

Of the religion variables, importance of religion appears to be the biggest deterrent in terms of juvenile delinquency. It may be that prayer, church attendance, and youth church activity are more forced religious activities brought upon respondents by their caretakers which may make them less of a deterrent to delinquent acts. Importance of religion on the other hand may be learned from parents; however, parental force cannot dictate how much or how little their child values religion. Due to the nature of this question, it may be the most effective in measuring religious influence and thus the degree to which religion deters juvenile delinquency. Prayer was particularly predictive of Black and female delinquency while church attendance was specifically predictive of females, Hispanics, and Whites in one case. Perhaps these trends are due to differences in religion based on race/ethnicity or maybe a result of varying cultural emphasis on certain religious activities.



As previous studies have indicated and this study also found, females tend to be more religious than males so it would make sense that these religion variables would be more relevant to females over males; however, males were certainly impacted as well. These results suggest that religion does have the power to be an effective deterrent to juvenile delinquency; however, that varying practices and varying personal value on religion may be what needs to be studied more to determine the most appropriate strategy per males and females and per race/ethnicity. While outlined in this paper, little research has centered on juvenile delinquency and religion in terms of gender or race/ethnicity; therefore, these findings both fill a gap in the literature as well as hopefully provide an initiative for further research on this area.

All statistically significant findings in terms of religious variables were found to have negative relationships with the delinquency variables indicating a possible deterring nature of religion regardless as to how strong these influences may be. It should not be argued that religion plays a minor role in deterring delinquency but that religion does in fact play a role that needs to be further investigated. As seen here, those with more ties to religion and religious activity committed less delinquent acts and from here we can begin to uncover what aspects of religion are influential and why.

## Gender

### Females

Across all results found here, females of all races/ethnicities were found to be more religious than males while they were also found to commit less delinquent acts than males as well. These findings are not particularly surprising given that other past research has also found

this to be the case (Smith & Pearce, 2003; Gauthier et al., 2006; Snyder & Sickmund, 2006; Schulte et al., 2009); however, these findings do support that these gender trends are still very much in place today. Again, as discussed in the literature, there may be other influences within this complex relationship between gender, delinquency, and religion such as socialization, gender roles, parenting, school influence, and many others. While religion may not be the strongest predictor of female delinquent activity, it has been seen to be a relevant influence and possibly more of a deterrent for females than for males.

### Males

Males were not only seen to be less religious overall but also more delinquent. Throughout the results, males were consistently found to commit more delinquent acts (both non-violent and violent) than females regardless of the other contributing factors. It does appear that males who participated in religious activities committed less delinquent acts; therefore, religion may still play a small role in deterring delinquency. As has been discussed in the literature, there seems to be many factors at-play here and while religion may be one of the contributing influences, it is not the most important—particularly for males.

It is important to note that the gender gap in terms of religiosity was not nearly as great here as seen in previous research. It could be that the sample here was more religious than previous samples; however, it still appears that females are both more religious and less delinquent than males and that this gender gap in delinquency could be as a result of higher religious involvement.

### Race/Ethnicity

Little research has investigated racial/ethnic trends with regard to delinquency and religion. While there were fewer significant findings to draw from here, it cannot be ignored that both Black and Hispanic individuals commit more delinquent acts than Whites while also being more religious than Whites. Based on the findings here, it could be that prayer is more influential to Blacks while church attendance is more influential to Hispanics. A Black family that encourages regular church attendance but not frequent prayer may not be adequately preventing their children from delinquency than they were if they were encouraging more prayer. The same could be said for a Hispanic family that encourages more prayer but not regular church attendance. It could be that different forms of religiosity impact people differently based on their racial/ethnic backgrounds which could be a result of cultural differences, religious affiliation differences, and possibly differences in family make-up. More research is certainly needed on this particular area to determine the specifics of these relationships and how religion could be better used as a deterrent for different adolescents.

### Limitations

Due to the nature of the sampling, a complex sample module had to be used to properly measure the data using the correcting weighting. This proved to be limiting as SPSS would not allow correlations to be ran while using the complex sample module. Correlations were conducted and presented here; however, the findings must be interpreted cautiously as they were not weighted.

It should also be noted that some respondents were left out of this study due to how the race and ethnicity questions were asked. In order to appropriately compare race/ethnicity, other

variables were created; however, in order to do this, some respondents had to be left out. This proves to be limiting to our study as we were unable to use all respondents.

The variables used here could have been phrased differently and asked differently for more effective surveying. For example, questions on how much importance one's family places on religion, prayer, church attendance, and youth church activity could have been helpful. Also, it would have been helpful to ask the reasoning behind respondents' church attendance, prayer, and youth church activity. Are they forced to go to church and/or pray by their parents/family? If not, do they go for social purposes, valued spiritual purposes, or another reason? One other interesting piece of information that may have been helpful to know is family income. These are all just a few areas that can hopefully be addressed in future studies.

The age range here was a bit broad and could have been more age-specific. Age was seen to be significant in many of the results here and it would have been interesting to see if these findings were any different for a closer range of ages. Because we had such a large range of ages including ages over 18 years old, it is harder to pinpoint the effects on juvenile delinquency or delinquency in general.

### Future Studies

Given the results here, more questions should have been asked about family involvement in one's religiosity and the impact that family/parents have on that religiousness. It would also be fitting to ask what area of religiosity one finds most important or perhaps questions on guilt or one's conscience. Also, based on the large age range here, I would suggest using data from a smaller range of respondents and only using respondents up to 18 years of age in order to pinpoint juvenile delinquency more specifically.

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